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## **Turkey's Search For A New Foreign Policy, 1923-1925: The View of Greek Diplomacy**

### ***Introduction***

The first two decades of the twentieth century was a difficult period for multinational empires in Europe and the Near East, but in the Ottoman case things were even worse. Following Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia in 1908 and the vicious ethnic fighting between Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs in the geographical region of Macedonia in 1904–1908, the Porte was soundly defeated by Italy during the 1911–1912 war, and then was all but expelled from Europe as a result of the Balkan Wars. The First World War would prove a turning point. Having sided with the Central Powers, the Ottoman Empire started an irreversible course towards dismemberment. The conclusion of the Sevres Peace Treaty (10 August 1920) confirmed what had already become clear after the Mudros Armistice less than two years earlier (30 October 1918): the Empire of the Sultan –which at the beginning of the 1910s stretched in three continents (Asia, Europe and Africa)– would be limited in the Anatolian plateau.

The implementation of the Treaty of Sevres would also result in the degradation of the geopolitical importance of the Ottoman Empire, which would be condemned in permanent economic weakness since it would be deprived of its more important resources. The prospect of territorial losses even within Asia Minor itself –which was regarded as the heart of the Empire–, contributed drastically to the formation of a gradually distended nationalist movement of resistance under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. The Nationalists had already made their appearance noticeable almost immediately after the occupation of the district of Smyrna by the Greek army in May 1919. A few months later, in the Congresses of Erzurum (July – August 1919) and Sivas (September 1919), the followers of Mustafa Kemal declared

their firm decision to claim those parts of the Empire inhabited by Turkish populations. The declaration of these aims in the National Pact of Ankara of January 1920 set the basis for the formation of the foreign policy of the Kemalist government: securing national unity as well as political and economic independence<sup>1</sup>.

Skillfully taking advantage of the international situation, the Nationalists of Mustafa Kemal managed during the last months of 1920 to secure their Eastern front by crushing the forces of the stillborn Armenian Republic, in close collaboration with the Soviet Union. Less than two years later, they also prevailed over the Greek armed forces, driving them out of Asia Minor and expelling the Greek populations of the region in the process. This signaled the final collapse of the Sevres Treaty. Thus, during the Lausanne Peace Conference, which was summoned in order to solve the final abeyances of the Eastern Question, the Turks could negotiate from a clearly stronger position compared to the distant days of 1919. As a result, the Lausanne settlement satisfied most of the Turkish demands, as those had been incorporated in the National Pact: Turkey not only secured the whole of Asia Minor, but also Eastern Thrace. At the same time, Turkey managed to end the old capitulations as well as much of the Ottoman public debt, a major step towards securing its fresh national independence.

This article studies the attitudes of Greek diplomacy towards the foreign policy of the new Kemalist regime in Turkey following the conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty<sup>2</sup>. Thus, although the emphasis is on the development of bilateral Greek-Turkish relations, special attention will also be paid to Greek perceptions regarding Ankara's new place on the international arena. The article is primarily based on the diplomatic correspondence of Ioannis Politis, the first Greek delegate in Turkey after the signature of the Lausanne Peace Treaty<sup>2</sup>, which gives a quite clear picture about the Greek attitude towards the external relations and the internal affairs –since in many cases these were interrelated– of the newly born Turkish Republic.

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1. For more details see Edward Reginald Vere-Hodge, *Turkish Foreign Policy (1918–1948)* (Ambilly–Annemasse: 1950), pp. 23–28. See also Dilek Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey: Economic and Foreign Policy Strategies in an Uncertain World, 1929–1939* (Leiden / New York / Köln: Brill, 1998), pp. 116–117.

2. In the first period after the conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty Greece and Turkey did not have normal diplomatic relations, and for this reason the appointment of Politis was in the rank of delegate and not in that of ambassador; see *Ioannis Politis Archive (Benaki Museum)* [= *I.P.A.*], 228/file 13, Politis to Roussos, No. 1470, [Ankara], 10 May 1924. The establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two neighboring countries was made possible only in the summer of 1925; see William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy (1774–2000)* (London / Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 59.

*The new Kemalist regime and the basis of Turkish foreign policy*

The conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty (24 July 1923) marked on the one hand the death of the Ottoman Empire, and on the other the birth of Kemalist Turkey. Thus, whereas for Greece the result of the Asia Minor War was indeed catastrophic, for Turkey it marked the beginning of a radically new historical period in comparison to the past. The Kemalist dominance was soon followed by a wave of fundamental changes in the new Turkish state: the eviction of the Sultan and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, the abolition of the Caliphate and the recognition of the strictly secular character of the state, were only some of the reforms which were imposed within the first years of the new regime.

However, the innovations of the new Nationalist regime were not easily accepted by the Turkish people. The clash between the reformists and the traditionalists was described in a very vivid way by the Greek delegate in Ankara, Ioannis Politis, who had been appointed to his post in December 1923. From his very first days in the new Turkish capital, Politis had understood the various difficulties that the government of the country faced. According to the Greek diplomat, the Kemalist regime not only lacked the unanimous acceptance of the Turks, but it was even doubtful whether it could secure the approval of just the majority of the Turkish people, since the drastic changes had created many reactions among the old fashioned Muslim population of the country<sup>3</sup>. What is more, the mounting financial difficulties of the Turkish state, together with the general economic problems of the country, a characteristic example of which was the apparent standstill in agricultural production<sup>4</sup>, created the basis for questioning the political hegemony of Mustafa Kemal.

Politis believed that the policy of economic isolation which had been favoured by the Kemalist regime was counterproductive, mainly because the Turkish economy simply lacked the necessary capital in order to “noticeably improve the situation”. He also pointed out that the exchange of Greek-Turkish populations which had been formally agreed in Lausanne in January 1923 had drastically contributed to the decline of many important sectors of production, such as the cultivation of olive trees, commerce and industry, in

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3. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Gonatas, No. 48, Ankara, 2 January 1924.

4. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Roussos, No. 2622, [Ankara], 7 October 1924.

which the Greeks used to play a major role in the recent past. Moreover, the inability of the Turkish government to settle the exchangeable Muslims from Greece, as well as the hostile way in which the latter were being treated by the Turkish authorities and the local populations, only added new obstacles to the already difficult work of economic reconstruction<sup>5</sup>.

In this context, Politis underlined that the Kemalist regime had not yet been firmly consolidated; he even noted that the organization of an anti-Kemalist movement was possible. According to his opinion, the relocation of the Turkish capital from Istanbul to Ankara was itself a proof that the new government, having complete knowledge of its precarious position, sought to be fortified against its internal enemies, since no immediate external danger was visible<sup>6</sup>. The fall of popularity of Mustafa Kemal himself, as well as the strengthening of the anti-Kemalist wing in the National Assembly –despite the strictly one-party character of the regime<sup>7</sup>–, were tangible examples of the political crisis which the Turkish government was facing<sup>8</sup>. What is more, the Greek diplomat reported that the situation was further worsened by the administrative chaos which was more than evident all over Turkey<sup>9</sup>, as well as by the weakness of the Turkish government to impose its decisions to the local authorities, which in many cases seemed to preserve a great deal of independence from Ankara<sup>10</sup>.

Under these circumstances, the attachment of the new Kemalist regime to the implementation of its reforming programme resulted in an inward turn of policy, more so since some of the major internal problems (as in the case for example of the Kurdish revolts in the Southeast provinces) threatened the territorial integrity of the young Republic<sup>11</sup>. In other words, the effort for creating a pure Turkish national state according to the Western European

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5. Ibid.

6. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Gonatas, No. 48, Ankara, 2 January 1924.

7. Politis explained that in Turkey the concept of democracy was in fact identified with the Kemalist People's Party, adding in a very characteristic way: "[...] Turkey and Democracy are two things completely separable"; see *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Roussos, No. 287, Ankara, 25 January 1924.

8. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Kafantaris, No. 784, Ankara, 3 March 1924.

9. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Roussos, No. 287, Ankara, 25 January 1924.

10. *Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs* [= *A.G.M.F.A.*], 1924, A/5/VI,3, Politis to Rentis, No. 1998, 17 July 1924.

11. Hale, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–57. For the Kurdish revolt of 1925 and the psychological effects which had on Turkish public opinion see also *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 787, [Ankara], 17 March 1925; Politis to Michalakopoulos, No. 856, [Ankara], 28 March 1925.

models, as well as the success of the wider social, economic, religious and other innovations, presupposed the avoidance of any problem in the field of foreign policy which might threaten to jeopardize the colossal task of the reconstruction of Turkey; and this fact had a decisive impact on the diplomatic orientations of Mustafa Kemal and his government<sup>12</sup>.

In this context, the basic priority of the new Turkish foreign policy was the maintenance of peace after a decade of armed conflicts, which naturally had exhausted the Turkish people. Turkey was in general terms satisfied from the territorial settlement of Lausanne; and from this point of view she had no reason to join the revisionist Powers, which sought to invert the Peace Treaties that had marked the end of World War I. On the contrary, Ankara was one of the major supporters of the status quo in Southeast Europe, adopting at the same time the tactic of neutrality, which included the avoidance of becoming member of any European coalition. Realistic in their concept, these basic options became the fundamental principles which determined the exercise of Turkish diplomacy in the years to come: securing the territorial integrity and the independence of the Turkish Republic<sup>13</sup>.

### *The Soviet Union and the League of Nations*

In this effort, the new Turkish leadership found a valuable ally: the equally newborn Soviet Union. The Turco-Soviet rapprochement can be traced back in the years of the Greek-Turkish war in Asia Minor (1919–1922). The turn of Mustafa Kemal to the Bolshevik regime reflected the urgent need to secure international support, as well as the necessary military and diplomatic aid in order to confront the advancing Greek army<sup>14</sup>. The conclusion of a series of bilateral accords, which clarified the thorny issue of the borders in the Caucasus, confirmed the close collaboration between Ankara and Moscow.

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12. *A.G.M.F.A.*, 1925, I/68,2, Politis to Roussos, No. 2512, Ankara, 22 September 1924. See also *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

13. See Κωνσταντίνος Σβολόπουλος, *Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος: 12 μελετήματα* (Αθήνα: Ελληνικά Γράμματα, 1999) [Constantinos Svolopoulos, *Eleftherios Venizelos: 12 studies* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata 1999)], p. 122.

14. For more details on Turco-Soviet relations during the above mentioned period see Bülent Gökay, *A Clash of Empires: Turkey between Russian Bolshevism and British Imperialism (1918–1923)* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997).

This collaboration would become even more solid after the signing of the Turco-Soviet Treaty of Neutrality and Non-Aggression on 17 December 1925<sup>15</sup>. In this context, the strengthening of bilateral ties, which would be further confirmed through the conclusion of many agreements of economic as well as political nature, was a tangible proof for many international observers in the mid-1920s about the entrance of Kemalist Turkey in the Soviet sphere of influence<sup>16</sup>.

The ability of Moscow to affect Turkish foreign policy exercised an equally decisive influence in the formation of Ankara's attitude towards the League of Nations. For the Soviets, the 1918 Entente intervention in Ukraine had given a tangible proof that Turkey was the necessary embankment against a possible invasion to their country from the South<sup>17</sup>. From this point of view, as long as the Soviet Union did not become member of the Geneva Organization and the Bolshevik regime continued to be internationally isolated, the Soviets had every reason to be interested in keeping Turkey away from the diplomatic embrace of Europe<sup>18</sup> and consequently outside from the League of Nations.

The special relation between Ankara and Moscow, besides serving the interests of both sides, was dictated by yet another factor: the suspicion of the Kemalists towards the Great Western Powers. The painful experiences of the relatively recent Ottoman past, when the Empire constituted a pawn in the hands of the Europeans, exercised a decisive psychological impact on the formation of Turkish foreign policy, which was combined with the fact that the public opinion of the country seemed to suffer from an intense syndrome of xenophobia as a result of the 1919–1922 War. In this context, Politis underlined that the success of the Nationalists in the Greek-Turkish War had led to an inflated perception, on the part of Turkish policy makers and public opinion, of their country's importance. The Turks seemed unwilling

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15. Παναγιώτης Ν. Πιπινέλης, *Ιστορία της εξωτερικής πολιτικής της Ελλάδος (1923–1941)* (Αθήνα: Σαλίβερος, 1948) [Panayiotis N. Pipinelis, *History of Greek foreign policy (1923–1941)* (Athens: Saliveros, 1948)], pp. 42–46. See also Αλέξης Αλεξανδρή, “Τουρκική εξωτερική πολιτική, 1923–1993: Βαλκάνια, Καύκασος και Κεντρική Ασία”, Θάνος Βερέμης (επιμ.), *Η Τουρκία σήμερα* (Αθήνα: Παπαζήσης, 1995) [Alexis Alexandris, “Turkish foreign policy, 1923–1993: Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia”, Thanos Veremis (ed.), *Turkey today* (Athens: Papazisis, 1995)], pp. 447–450.

16. See for example *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Michalakopoulos, No. 872, [Ankara], 31 March 1925; Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

17. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

18. Pipinelis, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

to agree to an approach with any of the Great Powers on the basis of mutual concessions, as they believed that the Turkish friendship was somehow the apple of discord, for which the candidates should pay a considerable price<sup>19</sup>.

Thus, Politis noted, Turkey not only was not in a hurry to join the League of Nations, but furthermore the Turkish officials did not hide their distrust towards the way the League was organized: the fact, for example, that no Asiatic country –with the unique exception of Japan– was represented in the Council of the League was in their minds a tangible proof of the European-centered character of the Geneva Organization. The Turkish government believed that its accession to the League should be followed by the appointment of Turkey as a permanent member of the Council, as well as with the reformation of the way the non-permanent members were elected. According to the Turkish officials, instead of the election of the non-permanent members, it would be more preferable if all countries were represented in the Council in turn. Ankara also suggested that the adoption of such a system, in combination with the increase of the number of non-permanent members, would reinforce the interest and the respect of smaller states towards the League of Nations, freeing at the same time the latter from the guardianship of the Great Powers. In this context, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tevfik Rüstü Bey, indicated to Politis that the Turkish government had already rejected a proposal made by the League, according to which Turkey would become member of the Organization and would simultaneously be elected as a non-permanent member of the Council<sup>20</sup>.

The objections of the Turkish political leadership, however, were not only limited in the formation and function of the League, but were also extended to vital provisions of its Covenant. The main objections were focused on the obligations that arose from the implementation of Article 16 of the Covenant, which provided the use of sanctions against states violating the process for the peaceful solution of international disputes<sup>21</sup>. As Tevfik Rüstü suggested, the already existing bonds between some states did not allow their participation in

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19. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 1286, [Ankara], 16 April 1924.

20. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

21. Article 16 of the Covenant stated as follows: “Should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Articles 12, 13 or 15, it shall ipso facto be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which hereby undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial or personal intercourse between the nationals of the



the League; this could change only if the League accepted certain reservations in relation with the implementation of Article 16. Politis was convinced that Ankara was mainly afraid of the reactions of Moscow in case Turkey decided to become member of the Geneva Organization, and he believed that the Turkish government was not willing either to create any point of friction with the Soviet Union, or to undertake any additional engagements by entering the League<sup>22</sup>.

### *The Great Western Powers and the Balkans*

The Turkish reluctance was intensified by the fact that even after the conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty there were still some open issues concerning Ankara, the most important among them being the Mosul question. Rich in oil, the region of Mosul was the apple of discord between Turkey and Great Britain. The bilateral negotiations had not managed to reach a mutually accepted compromise; the tension often escalated to a dangerous degree, as for example in the case of the bombardment of the Turkish city of Suleymaniye by the British Air Force in August 1923, which resulted in 37 casualties<sup>23</sup>. The Turks also suspected that London encouraged the Kurdish revolts near the Turco-Iraqi borders in order to weaken Ankara's diplomatic position in the Mosul question<sup>24</sup>.

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covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State, whether a Member of the League or not. It shall be the duty of the Council in such case to recommend to the several Governments concerned what effective military, naval or air force the Members of the League shall severally contribute to the armed forces to be used to protect the covenants of the League. The Members of the League agree, further, that they will mutually support one another in the financial and economic measures which are taken under this Article, in order to minimise the loss and inconvenience resulting from the above measures, and that they will mutually support one another in resisting any special measures aimed at one of their number by the covenant-breaking State, and that they will take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the Members of the League which are co-operating to protect the covenants of the League. Any Member of the League which has violated any covenant of the League may be declared to be no longer a Member of the League by a vote of the Council concurred in by the Representatives of all the other Members of the League represented thereon”.

22. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

23. Vere-Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

24. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 787, [Ankara], 17 March 1925.

The decision of the League of Nations on 16 December 1925 to allocate most of the former Ottoman vilayet of Mosul to Iraq<sup>25</sup>, which in turn was placed under the mandate of Great Britain for a period of 25 years, accentuated the already tense climate of Turco-British relations. The Turkish press did not exclude the possibility of war. Indeed, on 17 December 1925, only one day after the League’s decision, the Turkish government signed a Neutrality and Non-Aggression Treaty with the Soviet Union. The Turkish officials believed that they were reacting to a resurgence of British imperialism. Very quickly, however, and under the pressure of the diplomatic fait accompli of the decision by the League’s Council, the Turks were forced to change their attitude, recognizing in June 1926 the concession of the biggest part of the Mosul region to the British Mandate of Iraq<sup>26</sup>, and thus setting the start for the reestablishment of the relations between Ankara and London<sup>27</sup>.

During the same period, the Turco-French relations were also shadowed by the abeyances which were related to the regulation of colonial issues in the Middle East. Despite the fact that the French had offered their support to the Kemalists during the Greek-Turkish War, a support which reached its peak with the signing of the famous Franklin–Bouillon Agreement on 21 October 1921, in the years that followed the conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty the Turks did not hide their claims over the region of Alexandretta, which had been incorporated in the French Mandate of Syria. However, the disagreement between the two sides did not have the acidity which characterized the dispute over Mosul, even though some border incidents were not avoided<sup>28</sup>

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25. The League’s intervention was based on Article 3§2 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, which stated as follows: “The frontier between Turkey and Iraq shall be laid down in friendly arrangement to be concluded between Turkey and Great Britain within nine months. In the event of no agreement being reached between the two Governments within the time mentioned, the dispute shall be referred to the Council of the League of Nations. The Turkish and British Governments reciprocally undertake that, pending the decision to be reached on the subject of the frontier, no military or other movement shall take place which might modify in any way the present state of the territories of which the final fate will depend upon that decision”.

26. For the full text of the Treaty signed between Great Britain and Turkey in Ankara on 5 June 1926 and which determined in detail the borderline between Turkey and Iraq see *Treaty Series No. 18 (1927). Treaty between the United Kingdom and Iraq and Turkey regarding the settlement of the frontier between Turkey and Iraq together with Notes exchanged* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1927).

27. Vere–Hodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–64; Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 58–59.

28. Vere–Hodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–69. See also *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

since the final settlement of the Turco-Syrian frontiers was not achieved until the signing of the Turco-French Agreement on 30 May 1926<sup>29</sup>. This delay may also be connected to negotiations concerning the regulation of the public Ottoman debt, a subject which especially interested France, since French citizens were among the most important lenders of the old Empire of the Sultan<sup>30</sup>.

On the contrary, much more complicated appeared to be the situation concerning Turco-Italian relations. Even though Italy was in reality the first of the Great Western Powers that approached the Ankara government through the conclusion of a bilateral Agreement in March 1921, the resurgence of Italian expansive aspirations –including those concerning Southwest Asia Minor<sup>31</sup>– after Mussolini’s rise in power in October 1922, had brought again on surface Turkish suspicions. “The fact that Italy covets the Asia Minor soil”, Politis underlined, “is an axiom of Turkish diplomacy”<sup>32</sup>. Turkish fears did not lack a logical basis. After all, the Italians had occupied immediately after the end of World War I and in application of the Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne the region of Antalya, even though later they decided to evacuate it. From Ankara’s point of view, the revisionist policy of the Fascist regime constituted a major threat to the national security and the territorial integrity of Turkey. Mussolini’s declarations concerning the possible expansion of Italy in the East had only managed to reinforce this mistrust, creating at the same time a wave of anti-Italian sentiment in the Turkish public opinion, which was often reflected in the Turkish press<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, the fact that the Italians had kept the Dodecanese Islands, which could easily be used as a spring board for a possible military invasion in the Asia Minor coasts, intensified the Turkish sentiment of insecurity. The creation of a powerful naval base on the island of Leros, just a few miles away

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29. Barlas, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

30. Νεοκλής Σαρρής, *Εξωτερική πολιτική και πολιτικές εξελίξεις στην Πρώτη Τουρκική Δημοκρατία: η άνοδος της στρατογραφειοκρατίας (1923–1950)* (Αθήνα: Γόρδιος, 1992) [Neoklis Sarris, *Foreign policy and political developments in the First Turkish Republic: the rise of military-bureaucracy (1923–1950)* (Athens: Gordios, 1992)], p. 191.

31. *A.G.M.F.A., 1924, A/5/Ια’*, Kaklamanos to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 1738, London, 7 June 1924.

32. *I.P.A., 228/file 13*, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

33. *I.P.A., 228/file 13*, Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 1286, [Ankara], 16 April 1924. See also *A.G.M.F.A., 1926, 15.1*, Argyropoulos, “General Report No. 18 of the [Greek] Embassy in Ankara”, [Ankara], 4 May 1926.

from the Turkish coast, as well as the widespread rumors about the existence of a secret Italo-British alliance with an anti-Turkish orientation, seemed to confirm Ankara’s worries<sup>34</sup>. According to information gathered by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, when the Mosul question was still open and remained unsolved, Great Britain had made contacts with Italy in order to secure Rome’s military assistance in case of an armed Turco-British conflict. In return for promises for territorial gains at the expense of Turkey, Mussolini had accepted to help London, committing himself to send a military force of 250.000 men in Asia Minor, whereas his public statements had led the Turkish government to declare a partial mobilization of its army as a means of reacting to the possible threat<sup>35</sup>.

Ankara’s attachment to the post-Lausanne status quo largely determined the Turkish policy in the Balkans. The decline of Turkey’s influence in Balkan affairs as a result of the loss of the biggest part of her former European provinces, inevitably forced Ankara into adopting a more careful tactic. In this context, Turkish officials noted that the prime aim of their country was its internal reconstruction for which they needed a long period of peace and stability in their Balkan borders<sup>36</sup>. As a result, Ankara was mainly interested in safeguarding its Thracian borders against Bulgarian revisionism<sup>37</sup>. The Turks did not trust the Bulgarians, and they were especially worried about Sofia’s insistence to secure a territorial corridor connecting the Bulgarian mainland with the Aegean Sea<sup>38</sup>. The conclusion of the Turco-Bulgarian Friendship Pact in October 1925 revealed the desire of the Turkish government to secure its sovereignty over Eastern Thrace, thus trying to minimize Sofia’s pressures in this direction<sup>39</sup>.

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34. Alan Cassels, *Mussolini’s Early Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 226–230. See also *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], No. 1792, Ankara, 14 June 1924.

35. *A.G.M.F.A.*, 1927, 12.1, Tsamados to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 1095, Ankara, 20 July 1927.

36. *A.G.M.F.A.*, 1925, 17/68,2, Politis to Roussos, No. 2512, Ankara, 22 September 1924. See also *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

37. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

38. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 1286, [Ankara], 16 April 1924.

39. Pipinelis, *op. cit.*, pp. 45–46, 89.

The Turkish objective of preserving the existing balance of power in the Balkans was equally evident in the case of Turco-Yugoslav relations. Ankara was reacting against Belgrade's hegemonic tendencies<sup>40</sup>. The Turks thought that this hegemonism constituted a threat to the stability of the whole region. Furthermore, the fact that many Muslims were obliged to leave Serbia and Bosnia and move to Turkey had intensified the hostility of Turkish public opinion against Yugoslavia, making the bilateral understanding much more difficult. Thus, even after the signing of the Turco-Yugoslav Treaty of Peace and Friendship on 28 October 1925<sup>41</sup>, a development which seemed to mark the restoration of relations between Ankara and Belgrade, the Turkish government remained to a great extent suspicious since Yugoslavia continued to act as the leading Balkan Power.

### *Greek-Turkish relations*

The conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty marked a major change in Greek-Turkish relations. By accepting the territorial settlement agreed in the Swiss city, Athens and Ankara had in reality eliminated the most important factor that determined the violent confrontation between them. From the very first months after the signing of the Peace Treaty, the Greek and the Turkish governments did not stop to ensure one another about their sincere intentions to maintain good and friendly relations with their neighbors. Despite this, however, the bitter memories of the recent past could not easily be set aside. Politis, for example, did not have any doubts about the sincerity of Greek intentions and repeatedly stressed that the improvement of the relations with Ankara would favor the Greek interests; yet he often expressed his doubts about the honesty of the Turkish declarations<sup>42</sup>.

Politis believed that the Turks were not ready to accept the idea of a compromise with Greece, since the new Kemalist regime suffered from a widespread fanaticism which consequently affected its foreign policy<sup>43</sup>, given the fact that even after the Greek defeat in Asia Minor the Turks still

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40. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

41. Vere-Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

42. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Roussos, No. 287, Ankara, 25 January 1924.

43. *Ibid.*

considered Greece as the most imminent and direct threat<sup>44</sup>. He suggested that Turkey lacked a “positive and active foreign policy” and he did not think that this would change easily<sup>45</sup>. The only exception from this rule was, according to Politis, the Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Pasha, who was nevertheless in no position to change the situation by himself. Thus, the Greek diplomat did not rule out a real improvement of relations between Athens and Ankara, but suggested that only a strong Greece could convince the Turks to follow a less reluctant line towards her, thus inaugurating a peaceful period in the two coasts of the Aegean<sup>46</sup>.

In reality, Politis argued for patience. He seemed to suggest that the Greek government should wait before making any moves since the Kemalist regime was not firmly consolidated and it might as well prove a temporary one<sup>47</sup> (that is probably why the Greek diplomatic service kept a close eye on the action of various anti-Kemalist groups in the 1920s – a fact which is proved by the existence of numerous files in the Archive of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs– despite the fact that Athens had no intention to support such movements). Thus, by focusing the attention on the internal reconstruction of the country and the healing of the wounds of the recent past, Politis believed that Greece would soon be able to negotiate with Turkey from a much better position<sup>48</sup>.

The way Politis described Greek-Turkish relations in the first few months after Lausanne was clearly connected with the fact that the two countries had not managed to eliminate all the factors which suspended a closer bilateral cooperation. In fact, some of the regulations connected with the implementation of the Lausanne Convention for the Exchange of Greek-Turkish Populations added new problems, thus further complicating the existing situation. The most important disagreements between Athens and Ankara concerned on the one hand the question of the appraisal of the exchangeable properties, and on the other the interpretation of some terms of the above mentioned Convention

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44. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Kafantaris, No. 784, Ankara, 3 March, 1924; Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 1286, [Ankara], 16 April 1924.

45. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 1286, [Ankara], 16 April 1924.

46. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Roussos, No. 287, Ankara, 25 January 1924.

47. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Gonatas, No. 48, Ankara, 2 January 1924.

48. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Roussos, No. 287, Ankara, 25 January 1924; Politis to Kafantaris, No. 784, Ankara, 3 March 1924; Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 1286, [Ankara], 16 April 1924.

which were related to the non-exchangeable persons, as for example in the case of who should be regarded as *établis* in Western Thrace and Istanbul, respectively, according to Article 2 of the Convention<sup>49</sup>.

In early 1924, Greece and Turkey started negotiations trying to solve these problems, but the final results were not satisfactory, as the two sides could not reach an agreement. The controversies over a series of questions naturally halted the improvement of bilateral relations, which were further aggravated by the fact that because of the intense refugee problem Athens was not always in a position to comply with some of the stipulations of the Convention and especially those connected with the return of some non-exchangeable properties to their Muslim owners<sup>50</sup>. At the same time, the pro-Venizelist Greek governments, which maintained close ties with the Greek refugees from Turkey, were trying to avoid any painful compromise with Ankara on the question of the exchangeable properties which might risk dissatisfaction among the refugees. From his part, Politis –a prudent Venizelist himself– feared that the Turks were determined to diminish the number of the Greek minority of Istanbul. He underlined that the nationalistic program, called for the turkification of the country's economy<sup>51</sup> and aimed at the same target<sup>52</sup>.

Under these extremely unfavorable circumstances, the possibility of a Greek-Turkish rapprochement did not stand any chances, even though in some cases the interests of the two neighboring countries seemed to coincide. Tevfik Rüstü, for example, explained to Politis that Greece and Turkey needed to develop a relation of mutual understanding, trust and solidarity, as a means of balancing the Slavic danger of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Tevfik Rüstü added that Ankara wanted a long period of peace and stability in the Balkans in order to devote all of its efforts on the internal reconstruction Turkey<sup>53</sup>.

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49. For more details on the exchange of Greek-Turkish populations as well as the status of the minorities excluded from the exchange see Harry J. Psomiades, *The Eastern Question: The Last Phase. A Study in Greek-Turkish Diplomacy* (New York: Pella Publishing, 2000), pp. 53–80.

50. *A.G.M.F.A., 1927, 45.1*, Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No. 14305, Ankara, 19 April 1924.

51. For more details on this aspect see Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek Turkish Relations, 1918–1974* (Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1992, Second Edition), pp. 105–112.

52. *I.P.A., 228/file 13*, Politis to Roussos, No. 287, Ankara, 25 January 1924.

53. *A.G.M.F.A., 1925, I/68,2*, Politis to Roussos, No. 2512, Ankara, 22 September 1924. See also *I.P.A., 228/file 13*, Politis to Rentis, No. 2644, [Ankara], 10 June 1925.

The Turkish proposals, however, had little practical effect since the relations between Ankara and Athens were shadowed by the problems relating with the implementation of the Convention for the Exchange of Populations. The situation was further deteriorated when on 30 January 1925 the Turkish government decided to expel from Turkey, without the previous consent of the Mixed Commission, the newly elected Ecumenical Patriarch Constantine VI, arguing that the latter was exchangeable according to the Lausanne Convention<sup>54</sup>. The expulsion of Patriarch Constantine caused an outbreak of indignation in Greece, where some newspapers were even asking for the declaration of war against Turkey<sup>55</sup>. As a result, the Greek government of Andreas Michalakopoulos found itself in a very awkward position<sup>56</sup>, since it was clear that –as Politis explicitly suggested– a possible acceptance of the Turkish *fait accompli* would risk to weaken considerably the bargaining position of Athens in all the other major Greek-Turkish issues<sup>57</sup>. Thus, the Greek government decided to internationalize the issue by requesting from the League of Nations to consider the patriarchal question<sup>58</sup>.

The decision in favor of internalization prevented the deepening of the gap between Athens and Ankara, and provided the basis for a compromise. Indeed, by the end of May 1925 the Turkish government, in return for the withdrawal of the Greek appeal to the League of Nations and the formal abdication of Patriarch Constantine from his throne, agreed to consider all the members of the Patriarchal Holy Synod as non-exchangeable<sup>59</sup>. At the same time, the solution of the patriarchal question offered the two governments the

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54. For more details on the subject see Alexis Alexandris, “The Expulsion of Constantine VI: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and Greek–Turkish Relations (1924–1925)”, *Balkan Studies*, 22 (1981), pp. 333–363. See also Psomiades, *The Eastern Question ...*, pp. 92–93.

55. See for example *Ελεύθερη Φωνή*, 1 February 1925.

56. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Michalakopoulos to Embassies in Paris, London, Rome, Belgrade, Bucharest and Washington, No. 1318, Athens, 30 January 1925.

57. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Unnumbered, Ankara, 4 February 1925.

58. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 13, Michalakopoulos to Embassy in Berne, Unnumbered, 7 February 1925. It should be noted that the Greek appeal was based on Article 11 of the League’s Covenant, suggesting that the Patriarch’s expulsion constituted a threat against peace.

59. Αλέξης Αλεξανδρής, “Το ιστορικό πλαίσιο των ελληνοτουρκικών σχέσεων (1925–1955)”, *Οι ελληνοτουρκικές σχέσεις, 1923–1987* (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Γνώση / ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ) [Alexis Alexandris, “The historical context of Greek-Turkish Relations, (1925–1955)”, *Greek-Turkish Relations 1923–1987* (Athens: Gnosi Publications / ELIAMEP)], p. 62.



opportunity to sign on 21 June 1925 the Agreement of Ankara, which sought to settle most of the abeyances relating with the Convention of Lausanne for the Exchange of Populations<sup>60</sup>.

The Agreement of Ankara, however, was never implemented. A few days after its conclusion the government of Michalakopoulos was overthrown by General Theodoros Pangalos who imposed his dictatorship in Greece and brought a dramatic change in Greek foreign policy<sup>61</sup>, especially as far as relations with Turkey were concerned. Pangalos had never acquiesced to the Lausanne Peace Treaty and one of his ambitions was to change the territorial status quo that this Treaty had imposed. In this context, the Greek dictator on the one hand adopted a tougher line towards Ankara, and on the other he tried to secure international support for his dream of recapturing Eastern Thrace and possibly a part of Western Asia Minor. Pangalos' revisionistic aspirations were also encouraged by the continuing abeyance of the Mosul question, which according to his opinion would sooner or later lead Turkey and Great Britain to war against each other with Italy intervening in favor of London. Thus, Pangalos sought to secure Italy's support in case of a Greek-Turkish war. The visit, however, of the Greek Foreign Minister, Loukas Kanakaris Roufos, to Rome in March 1926 did not prove fruitful, as Mussolini refused to give any specific commitments to Athens<sup>62</sup>.

The fall of Pangalos' dictatorship in August 1926 once again brought Athens in the road of realism and prudence. His short-lived regime, however, had already severely damaged Greece's international credibility, thus intensifying the diplomatic isolation of the country. As far as Greek-Turkish relations were concerned, the fact that Pangalos had refused to ratify the Agreement of Ankara strengthened the Turkish mistrust towards the intentions of Athens and created a similar impression to the neutral members of the Mixed Commission for the Exchange of Populations<sup>63</sup>. Thus, Pangalos

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60. For the provisions of the Agreement of Ankara see Stephen P. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities. Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), pp. 506–509.

61. For the Greek foreign policy during the 14-month period of Pangalos' dictatorship (June 1925 – August 1926) see more thoroughly Harry Psomiades, “The diplomacy of Theodoros Pangalos (1925–1926)”, *Balkan Studies*, 13 (1972), pp. 3–26.

62. See Αθανάσιος Βερέμης, “Η δικτατορία του Πάγκαλου”, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους*, τόμος ΙΕ' (Αθήνα: Εκδοτική Αθηνών, 1978), [Athanasios Veremis, “The dictatorship of Pangalos”, *History of the Greek nation*, vol. XV (Athens: Ekdotiki Athenon)], pp. 293–294.

63. *I.P.A.*, 228/file 14, Politis to Roufos, Unnumbered, Athens, 19 March 1926.

had found himself in the awkward position of being obliged to renegotiate the above mentioned Agreement but from a clearly worsened position. These negotiations, speeded by the fall of the Pangalos’ regime, finally resulted in the conclusion of the Agreement of Athens on 1 December 1926, which once again tried to solve the problems that arose from the Lausanne Convention.

The Agreement of Athens was undoubtedly much less favorable to Greece than that of Ankara signed a year earlier, in relation both to the question of the appraisal of the exchangeable properties as well as that of the *établissements*; and this change obviously reflected the spasmodic moves as well as the general disorganization of Greek foreign policy during the 14-month Pangalos’ dictatorship. As the British ambassador in Turkey, Sir John Clerk, put it, in reality by the new Agreement Greece “[had] made special sacrifices to secure the protocol [:Agreement of Ankara] of 1925”<sup>64</sup>. The implementation of certain provisions of the Convention, however, would keep on shadowing Greek-Turkish relations for quite a long time, since despite the initial optimism and the ratification of the Agreement of Athens by both the contracting parties, it would in reality remain for its most part a dead letter.

### *Conclusion*

“The State of Ankara is entitled to be proud for everything that it had achieved. Based on the consciousness that the decision of Sevres abolished both the undisputed rights of the Turkish people and the declared principles by the Allies during the determination of the war goals, it had taken on a difficult battle of decisions, from point zero, to reach a point that would enable it to fight against the injustice and secure for Turkey the owed position in the family of civilized nations, from which it was attempted to be expelled. Turkey managed to cope with the Pan-European injustice that Greek hands had undertaken to impose, and to accomplish the National Pact of Ankara, which constitutes the Decalogue of the just claims of the Turkish people, and is now in the happy position to consider that she had earned her freedom and the right and means to live and advance among the civilized nations as an equal among equals”<sup>65</sup>.

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64. See Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul ...*, p. 129.

65. See Ismet’s statement in *H Καθημερινή*, 25 July 1923.

In this way Ismet Pasha described Turkish achievements immediately after the signing of the Lausanne Peace Treaty. In general, Turkish foreign policy in the first years after Lausanne appeared to be quite cautious. Turkey seemed to be more interested in her internal reconstruction, thus putting most of her weight in the effort of implementing and subsequently consolidating the reforms initiated by Mustafa Kemal himself. At the same time, the feeling of mistrust towards the Western Powers because of the painful memories that the recent Ottoman past had accumulated to the Turks—mainly as a result of the Turkish defeat in World War I—, limited in practice the horizons of Turkish diplomacy. In this context, the close relationship with the Soviet Union affirmed this ascertainment, and this was further intensified by Ankara's fears about British policy in the Middle East and Italian policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

From the Greek point of view, Turkey was not thought as a trustworthy neighbor. Prominent and influential Greek diplomats like Politis were not convinced about the good intentions of Ankara towards Athens. The problem arising out of the populations exchange, and the feelings of many Greek officials—including Politis—that the Kemalist regime could prove to be of a temporary nature, halted in practice any effort that could lead to the improvement of bilateral relations, even though in many cases—as for example in that of their common desire to safeguard the territorial status quo in the Balkans against any possible threat—the interests of Athens and Ankara seemed to coincide. The aggravation of Greek-Turkish relations during the period of the Pangalos' dictatorship—despite the fact that in reality the latter constituted an obvious deviation from the basic rules of Greek foreign policy after 1922—proved that even in Greece not everybody had accepted the conclusive character of the Lausanne settlement. In reality, only after the fall of the dictatorship in August 1926 did Greek-Turkish relations enter a more constructive phase that would reach its climax in 1930, when—under the influence of Eleftherios Venizelos—the two countries would first settle their differences deriving from the Convention for the Exchange of Populations (10 June 1930) and then they would sign a bilateral Treaty of Friendship (30 October 1930), thus setting the basis for the Greek-Turkish Entente of the following decade.